

## NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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In the Matter of:ACCIDENT OF THE LADY D  
ON MARCH 6, 2004  
in Baltimore, Maryland

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Docket No. DCA 04 MM015Saturday,  
March 6, 2004

INTERVIEW OF:

EILEEN ROCCELLA

PRESENT:

MORGAN J. TURRELL, NTSB  
MARK HAMMOND  
ED NARIZZANO  
WILLIAM BEAVERS

## P R O C E E D I N G S

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MR. TURRELL: Okay. This is Morgan Turrell of the National Transportation Safety Board. And we are doing an interview on the water taxi accident in Baltimore. We are at Johns Hopkins Hospital. And we have four party members with us. I will let them introduce themselves.

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Lieutenant Commander Hammond, Coast Guard Baltimore.

MR. NARIZZANO: Ed Narizzano, Seaport Taxi.

OFFICER BEAVERS: Officer William Beavers, Southern District, Baltimore City Police.

MR. TURRELL: Okay. Thank you. And we will start with the witness to introduce himself, his name and age, first.

DR. ROCCELLA: I am Dr. Ed Roccella, age 59. I work at the National Institutes of Health at the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute in Bethesda, Maryland.

MR. TURRELL: Okay. Sir, have you, how often do you come to Baltimore and take the water taxi, is this your first time?

DR. ROCCELLA: My first occasion on the water taxi.

1                   MR. TURRELL: Okay. And was anyone with you  
2                   today?

3                   DR. ROCCELLA: Yes, my wife, Eileen Roccella,  
4                   my son Andrew Roccella, his fiancée Corrine Schilling,  
5                   her parents, Denny Schilling, Karen Schilling.

6                   MR. TURRELL: Okay. And if you would, sir,  
7                   just take us through the, through the day, starting  
8                   this morning and take us through the accident, if you  
9                   would.

10                  DR. ROCCELLA: We got up this morning and met  
11                  at our home at 10:30, proceeded to come to Baltimore  
12                  for the purposes of originally going to the Aquarium.  
13                  We came to Baltimore in two cars. We found a parking  
14                  space in a parking lot near the Aquarium, walked back  
15                  to a restaurant on Harbor Place, something View. I am  
16                  not quite sure of the name.

17                  MR. TURRELL: Okay.

18                  DR. ROCCELLA: Proceeded to have lunch and  
19                  went to the Aquarium. The Aquarium line was an hour 15  
20                  minutes wait. And we saw the signs to go to Fort  
21                  McHenry Tunnel, and we proceeded to go to one taxi, but  
22                  they told us that they take a taxi, the water taxi take  
23                  us to a spot and then we take a bus and we went to the  
24                  other water taxi. They told us that they would take us  
25                  Fells Point and then from there we would be able to

1 take another water taxi to Fort McHenry. The cost was  
2 \$6.00 round trip, which we paid.

3 We took the water taxi to Fells Point, got  
4 off at Fells Point, and were directed to a second water  
5 taxi and we went to Fort McHenry.

6 We debarked at Fort McHenry, stayed  
7 approximately a little more than an hour. Saw the film  
8 on the Star Spangled Banner, witnessed the barracks for  
9 the troops. Came back and knew that there was a four  
10 o'clock taxi, it was the last taxi back we were told.  
11 We were there a little early and we got there, and it  
12 looked stormy, black clouds were in the sky. We saw  
13 the water taxi approach, and we then proceeded to, we  
14 were told that the water taxi was here and we were able  
15 to board the water taxi.

16 We all got into the taxi, took our seats. We  
17 waited for two gentlemen to come down who were taking  
18 pictures. And as they boarded, it started to rain. I  
19 sat in the rear of the taxi, and I saw the Honda 90  
20 horsepower engine. Backed out, the rains came and it  
21 started raining harder. The captain backed out of the  
22 harbor situation, harbor position, circled the boat  
23 around and started making destination towards Fells  
24 Point. As he proceeded to go Fells Point, the rain  
25 storm started more severely. With that rain, the winds

1     picked up. As we were going the boat heeled starboard  
2     and the natural instinct of the passengers on the  
3     starboard side brought them to the port side, where  
4     they got up off their chairs to the port side, hit  
5     right at the boat. I held one woman by her arm to keep  
6     her from sliding back down across the boat. The  
7     captain then took the boat into the wind, at which time  
8     the boat leveled and the passengers were told to sit  
9     down.

10             The wind proceeded in a very violent manner.  
11     He had the boat into the wind. The mate said, well,  
12     we have got life preservers onboard. Never asked us to  
13     or directed us to put them on. The boat was into the  
14     wind, and the captain decided to circle around and so,  
15     as, he was into the wind and for some reason he went  
16     port. As he went into port, the wind then proceeded to  
17     take the side of the boat as a sail and the boat heaved  
18     extremely so. So, he caught the wind and the boat just  
19     heaved to the extent where eventually it just keeled  
20     over and we started taking on water.

21             I tried to grab my wife, and the water came  
22     in furiously. I was up into the top of the cabin,  
23     the water came in. And it got dark and black. I  
24     proceeded to push on what I thought was the floor,  
25     which turned out to be the, excuse me, the ceiling

1     which turned out to be the floor, and I was hitting  
2     metal. I couldn't get out in that way. The cabin was  
3     now filled with water, and as I frantically looked to  
4     push out, somehow I found an opening on the side of the  
5     paneling and was able to surface.

6             When I came to the surface, I was able to  
7     grab the side of the pontoon, which was filled with  
8     coral and it scratched our hands. I looked around and  
9     saw some people and I was able to climb up on the  
10    pontoon between the two boats, between the two pontoons  
11    onto the platform. I immediately looked around and saw  
12    some people, I saw the captain over the side of the  
13    boat. He has the beard. I grabbed him, and with some  
14    help pulled him up. He was synoptic, blue. I  
15    proceeded to give him about six puffs of air in order  
16    to revive him. Pushed his chest twice, his color came  
17    back, he started breathing. I looked around and pulled  
18    the woman up, put her into the boat. I saw Denny  
19    Schilling, I gave him a hand, he was a little heavier,  
20    I pulled him on the boat. By the boat, I mean, the,  
21    what was left of the craft, which had turtled. And on,  
22    what we were standing on was the platform between the  
23    two tubes, if you will, that made the boat float.

24             I looked around for my son and my wife,  
25    didn't see them. I looked around some more and saw my

1 wife and she was being pulled onto the boat by two more  
2 men, I don't know who pulled her up. She was screaming  
3 that her arm, her shoulder was in pain. She saw me  
4 yell.

5 (Pause.)

6 DR. ROCCELLA: I looked out and saw Karen  
7 Schilling and some men were trying to pull her up and  
8 pulled her up onto the boat. We then proceeded to see  
9 the heavier man, it was very, very syncopic. And I  
10 went closer to him and I started pushing on his chest.  
11 I pushed it down, he seemed to be, as I pushed it  
12 down, he seemed to be upchucking, upchucking white  
13 material out of himself. And there were other people  
14 taking care of him. I kept looking for my son and his  
15 fiancée, they weren't to be found.

16 By that time the rescue craft came. I am not  
17 sure whether it was the Coast Guard at first or the  
18 Baltimore Fire Department, but there was a rescue, one  
19 rescue craft and then a second came. The proceeded to  
20 put a line around the motor and secure the boat.

21 There was a younger man, coming to the craft  
22 and we were on the craft, there was people hanging on  
23 the side of the boat. It was a younger guy and I told  
24 him, my son and his fiancée may be under, below. He  
25 dove down to try and find them. And he said the water

1 is too dark, I can't see anything down there. I  
2 appealed to him again, he made a second trip and came  
3 back up. He couldn't find anything. I handed him a  
4 line, and I said take the line, I will secure it here,  
5 try again, which he did. He came back up empty handed.  
6 I proceeded to then pull him aboard the craft.

7 At that point we saw the heavy man, and went  
8 over to him and pushed on his chest. And that white  
9 fluid came out and he coughed and he spit it out.  
10 Others then tended to him. He just can't pushing,  
11 vomiting up the volume fluid that was in his lungs.

12 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

13 DR. ROCCELLA: At that point the rescue craft  
14 came, I think it was the Coast Guard, yes, the Coast  
15 Guard was first. And I yelled that my son and fiancée  
16 were below. And a young Coast Guard man, or Naval man,  
17 Coast Guard man, took off his shirt and jumped in the  
18 water and tried to dive in and tried to see who was  
19 below. Couldn't find them. They secured a line  
20 against the Honda motor, were able to lift it, and he  
21 looked and they said they couldn't see anybody in the  
22 craft and then again it was dark. He risked his life  
23 as the boat came closer to the, as the Coast Guard boat  
24 came closer to the wrecked water taxi and he was able  
25 to get out in time and not be crushed by the collision



1 of the two.

2 They were out there, they found a woman on  
3 the side of the boat, heavy woman, and they were trying  
4 to get her into the craft, and I looked at her and I  
5 went down closer to see if I could get into a position  
6 to give her CPR. She was syncopic. I could not. I  
7 couldn't get close enough to her. We then tried to  
8 pulled her up onto the, onboard. It took them quite  
9 awhile to get her up onboard and when they did, the  
10 Coast Guard crew acted quickly, started giving her CPR.

11 Then there was commotion on the front of the  
12 boat, the bough of the Coast Guard boat, and they were  
13 yelling that they had a child. And she was lifted up  
14 on the front of the boat. And the Coast Guard people  
15 were taking care of her.

16 Thereafter, I kept looking for my son, and  
17 yelling, the craft was drifting away. I asked the  
18 Coast Guard man to secure the drifting craft, my son  
19 still could be up underneath there. There could still  
20 be air trapped, they could still be alive. He said  
21 there is rescue craft coming, divers were coming. By  
22 that time the water taxi had drifted several hundred  
23 yards away. I saw in the distance that the rescue  
24 group was securing the taxi. I didn't see anybody. It  
25 was too far for me to see any divers. I don't know.

1                   Coast Guard people brought me whatever  
2 clothes they had. I was soaking wet having been in the  
3 water, I am not sure how long.

4                   MR. TURRELL: Okay. I have a few questions  
5 and then I will let the other party members ask some  
6 questions.

7                   The boat left around four o'clock.

8                   DR. ROCCELLA: A little before four, yes.

9                   MR. TURRELL: A little before four. Okay.

10                  DR. ROCCELLA: Yes.

11                  MR. TURRELL: And can you roughly tell us how  
12 much time elapsed before the boat turned over?

13                  DR. ROCCELLA: We weren't out that long. It  
14 was raining, that 90 horsepower Honda was going along.

15                  It was quick, five minutes we were out in the water,  
16 maybe. I am not quite sure, but it didn't seem like we  
17 were out too long.

18                  MR. TURRELL: Okay. And do you, you sound like  
19 you may have some maritime background.

20                  DR. ROCCELLA: I have done a little bit of  
21 sailing.

22                  MR. TURRELL: Okay. So you know the  
23 starboard, port --

24                  DR. ROCCELLA: I was sitting on the port side  
25 of the craft.

1 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

2 DR. ROCCELLA: The wind came across our back,  
3 and keeled us up, excuse me, that is right, keeled us  
4 up. My side on the port was lifted up, if I am not  
5 mistaken, it just lifted us up.

6 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

7 DR. ROCCELLA: I am not sure that the -- But,  
8 the people on the starboard side immediately out of  
9 instinct, came over to try and right the boat and it  
10 helped some.

11 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

12 DR. ROCCELLA: The captain brought the boat  
13 around into the wind, to level the boat out.

14 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

15 DR. ROCCELLA: People were told to sit down.  
16 He was keeping that position and it kept us level. Why  
17 he swung the boat around, I am not sure, and why he  
18 didn't just take that position and hold it, into the  
19 wind to keep it level and ride the storm, I don't know.  
20 The decision was made to swing the boat around, as he  
21 swung the boat around, the wind gust took it and just  
22 toppled it and it toppled it quickly. And it was at  
23 that time we, all kind of chaos. And then you have got  
24 the rest of my story after that. But, I am convinced  
25 had we stayed into the wind, pointed into the wind,

1       that motor would have held it and we could have just  
2       had a rough ride, not go anywhere, but we would not  
3       have tipped.

4               MR. TURRELL: Okay. When the captain brought  
5       the bough around, out of the wind.

6               DR. ROCCELLA: Yes.

7               MR. TURRELL: It was to port?

8               (Pause.)

9               DR. ROCCELLA: Well, let's see. I was on the  
10       port side. He brought the boat, he drove it to  
11       starboard, which then made the port side lift and keel  
12       and over and it went down, because my side went that  
13       way. My side, my port side lifted up and he brought it  
14       down.

15              MR. TURRELL: Okay.

16              DR. ROCCELLA: So he was trying to angle the  
17       boat back, to go back to Fells Point.

18              MR. TURRELL: Which was the intended  
19       destination.

20              DR. ROCCELLA: That was destination.

21              MR. TURRELL: So you think that attempting, in  
22       your words, he was attempting to return to the original  
23       destination.

24              DR. ROCCELLA: Right.

25              MR. TURRELL: Okay. Can you describe, you were

1 sitting on the port side, can you describe the number  
2 of passengers and people seated around you, like  
3 children and --

4 DR. ROCCELLA: I was at the last seat on the  
5 port side, next to me was my wife, next to her was  
6 Denny Schilling, next to her was Karen Schilling.  
7 Directly across from me was the blonde woman, perhaps  
8 26 years old.

9 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

10 DR. ROCCELLA: There were three men who were  
11 Spanish speaking, who were on the boat, younger men.

12 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

13 DR. ROCCELLA: There was a child on the boat.  
14 There was a heavy woman on the boat. There was an  
15 older man who was -- on the boat. There was the  
16 captain, there was a mate.

17 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

18 DR. ROCCELLA: There were two younger men, the  
19 last two to get on the boat, were taking pictures.

20 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

21 DR. ROCCELLA: I am not sure how many that  
22 might have been.

23 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Now, when you came  
24 onboard the boat, and you went onboard, was there any  
25 discussion, was there any briefing at all or any talk

1       about safety at all?

2               DR. ROCCELLA: We, when we boarded the boat at  
3       Fells Point, it was just we boarded and took off, and  
4       when we boarded the boat at Fort McHenry, we just  
5       boarded and took off. When we boarded the boat at the  
6       Harbor, the Baltimore Harbor, there was a --

7               How am I doing?

8               (Pause.)

9               DR. ROCCELLA: When I boarded the boat at the  
10       Harbor, there was an introduction about the tour, the  
11       young man was did not articulate well. It was hard to  
12       understand him. And he spoke rapidly. It was a  
13       younger man. He had --

14              MR. TURRELL: Okay. I will turn it over to  
15       the Coast Guard now. Commander, any questions?

16              LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Doctor, you  
17       said when you got on the boat at Fort McHenry, you  
18       noticed the weather. Was there any discussion on the  
19       boat by anyone of the weather conditions?

20              DR. ROCCELLA: My wife wasn't happy at all.  
21       She said to me, look at those clouds. I said, well,  
22       these guys know what they are doing. No other  
23       discussion.

24              LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: What about the  
25       crew of the taxi, did they making any mention of the

1 weather?

2 DR. ROCCELLA: No.

3 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Okay.

4 DR. ROCCELLA: Going from Fells Point to Fort  
5 McHenry, on the boat as we were going, on the floor one  
6 of the sheet metal screws popped up, and as it popped  
7 up, water shot up through the floorboards, which  
8 startled my wife. And one of the crew in the rear made  
9 some kind of humorous gesture, I don't recall, she  
10 didn't think it was funny. As we left the boat, I  
11 asked her if she wanted the screw as a souvenir. She  
12 said no.

13 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: You mentioned  
14 something about, somebody told, instructed the  
15 passengers to don on the life jackets.

16 DR. ROCCELLA: No, I don't think we were ever  
17 told to do that. We were told, as the wind was real  
18 hard, the mate in the back, went to the front and said,  
19 well, we have got life jackets.

20 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Okay.

21 DR. ROCCELLA: That is all he said.

22 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Okay.

23 DR. ROCCELLA: There wouldn't have time to put  
24 them on.

25 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: And where you

1       were sitting, were you able to hear any radio  
2       transmissions?

3               DR. ROCCELLA: None.

4               LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: None.   Okay.

5               LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Did you  
6       observer a radio?

7               DR. ROCCELLA: I don't recall, but give me a  
8       minute, let me think.

9               (Pause.)

10              DR. ROCCELLA: I can almost say for sure there  
11       was a radio onboard the boat, the craft from the  
12       Harbor. I can't recall the one from Fells Point,  
13       because it was such a rush when we got there, that we  
14       quickly had to run to the boat to get onto it in order  
15       to make the boat, so we didn't have to wait for the  
16       next one, to Fort McHenry. Coming back, there was a  
17       rush to get on the boat because they saw, I think the  
18       person, who was on land, said it is coming, let's get  
19       going. And then we ran onto the boat. So, there was a  
20       rush to get on the boat. And I am just assuming to  
21       beat the storm, but, I am not sure. That is what the  
22       implication was.

23              LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Okay. Just one  
24       more question. Did you note from where you sitting,  
25       you said you were near the engine, could you tell if



1 the engine was running at a high speed, medium speed,  
2 in your estimation?

3 DR. ROCCELLA: We had a pretty good throttle.

4 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: Okay.

5 DR. ROCCELLA: We had a pretty good throttle.

6 LIEUTENANT COMMANDER HAMMOND: That is all I  
7 have at this point.

8 MR. NARIZZANO: I have no questions.

9 MR. TURRELL: Officer?

10 OFFICER BEAVERS: No questions.

11 MR. TURRELL: Just, were all the boats, all  
12 the passengers facing forward on this craft, or were  
13 they opposite each other sitting --

14 DR. ROCCELLA: Opposite.

15 MR. TURRELL: -- knee to knee.

16 DR. ROCCELLA: Opposite, they faced each other  
17 opposite --

18 MR. TURRELL: Okay. And we will conclude the  
19 interview on tape now. Is there anything else you  
20 would like to add at this time, anything you would like  
21 to relate to us?

22 DR. ROCCELLA: No. Please find my son.

23 MR. TURRELL: Okay.

24 DR. ROCCELLA: And his fiancée.

25 MR. TURRELL: Okay. Thank you. This concludes

1       the tape recording of this interview.

2                   (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)